Wisconsin Child Care Research and Data Capacity Project

Grantee: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
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Project Title: Wisconsin Child Care Data Sharing Project

Description
The Wisconsin Child Care Data Sharing Project will establish a statewide research infrastructure to strengthen analysis, interpretation, and sharing of critical administrative child care data from multiple state sources. The Department of Workforce Development-Child Care Section is the lead agency for the Data Sharing Project, with partners that include: University of Wisconsin-Extension (also the lead agency for the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership); Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral Network (providing support and technical assistance to the 16 CCR&Rs that serve all communities in the state); and *The Registry* (Wisconsin's child care professional career development recognition system). The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (responsible for state child care licensing) is an active participant in the grant.

- The first goal will be development of a merged statewide child care provider file that includes data on all licensed and certified child care facilities, using a common identification number. Once created, the merged statewide child care provider file will be expanded to include data from the CCR&R, Registry, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), public schools, and recipients of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. This file will provide a platform for conducting state-level policy research on parent selection of child care, supply and demand for child care in low-income neighborhoods, and mechanisms for improving child care quality statewide.
- The second goal will be to explore models for enhancing the CCR&R system to provide parents with data on key child care quality indicators using the merged statewide child care provider file in order to enhance parents' abilities to make informed child care decisions.

A Data Sharing Advisory Group will work in collaboration with state agencies and other relevant stakeholders to develop agreed-upon systems for cross-agency partnerships, data sharing, and strategic planning for selection of data for public consumption.

Major Research Questions
The research components of the Project are focused on primary administrative data already being collected in two separate state agencies, the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Department of Health & Family Services (DHFS). Those data are used to make accurate payments to providers in the subsidy system and to document current certified and licensed providers. The data are also used by Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies statewide and *The Registry*, for their unique purposes. CCR&Rs document child care supply and demand through planning and referral services at the local level, and *The Registry* documents training levels for early childhood staff who have applied for professional development recognition. Research questions flow from each sector using child care data for these unique purposes. The study of efforts to merge a statewide provider file will address the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of child care programs and providers serving the general public and those serving families receiving subsidy?

- What factors are associated with becoming part of the child care subsidy system from a provider point of view?

- What difficulties are present in matching the discrete databases (e.g. which fields do not match electronically, which fields have unique identifiers, which systems have not been updated, etc.)?

In the area of child care quality indicators we are asking the following questions:

- Which regularly collected quality indicators (such as enforcement actions by DHFS licensing) can be added to the referral function of CCR&R, so as to help inform consumers about quality of care?

- Which quality indicators not easily obtained at present (e.g. substantiated complaints) could be systematically collected in the future?

- How is the price of child care by type of care, age of child, and location (e.g. county) related to the availability of higher quality care as judged by the quality indicators?

- How do consumers use and respond to quality indicators in their selection of care? Are there differences among low-income and other income child care consumers?

Research and Evaluation Design
The study of and implementation of a merged provider file will involve linking data from the child care subsidy program with data from other administrative data sources. University of Wisconsin-Extension provides the technical evaluation for this project, and works with the Data Group to define the barriers to answering the research questions. DHFS data currently contain detailed information on providers, including violations, findings, orders and enforcement actions, but are not easily accessible by the public. DWD data are stored in a Data Warehouse and include family characteristics, provider characteristics, and rates, and only authorized users may access this state-of-the-art database. CCR&R databases are not currently merged, but are localized for community planning. The Data Sharing Project's visionary design involves assigning unique identifiers to all providers, electronic access by user groups, greater consumer awareness, and improved efficiency for state agencies. A longitudinal data set will be constructed and descriptive statistical analyses will be used to explore our research questions.

Contact
Alan M. Sweet
Child Care Section
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
201 E. Washington Ave., Room E100
Madison, WI 53707-7972
Phone: (608) 267-2078
Fax: (608) 261-6968
Email: alan.sweet@dwd.state.wi.us
Web site: http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/dws/programs/childcare/default.htm